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ABSTRACT

Since 1984, public schools have undergone three waves of reform. An effort to raise student achievement was followed by putting greater demands on teachers. The current and third wave emphasizes using the resources of business, industry, and the community to improve education. The goals of this reform movement were codified in the America 2000 program, which sought to improve the educational opportunities for children and adults. In 1992, there was a meeting of the Southwestern New Mexico Regional Conference on America 2000 National Education Goals. A follow-up questionnaire sent to conference participants revealed that noneducators were more pleased with the meeting than educators. Generally, the most positive results from the conference were the growing partnerships between the community and the educational system and the recognition of their importance. Educators and noneducators felt that significant educational funding increases were needed. Both groups also doubted the long-term effects of America 2000. Also agreed upon was that school-community partnerships would increase, larger schools would benefit more, better preparation of children for school was needed, and drugs and violence needed to be eradicated from schools. Tables and figures on the survey are included. (Contains 18 references.) (JPT)

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Setting Regional Priorities for America 2000

by

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Since 1984 with the publication of *A Nation in Crisis*, the public school systems of the United States have seen what Dean Corrigan of Texas A & M University has called three "waves" of educational reform. The first response to that aforementioned dismal report came in the form of demands for control of educational outputs via testing in order to raise student achievement. Corrigan and other observers of the Reform Movement have termed this phase an attempt to "achieve excellence by fear."[1] When these tactics caused teacher morale to drop and more students than ever to drop out of school, a second wave occurred as reformers demanded higher degrees of accountability on the part of teachers through skills testing of educators and competency-based evaluation of their performance in the classroom. Finally, by the last year of the decade, when it had become all too clear that legislated mandates were not the answer to the ills of the nation's public schools, a third wave of reform was initiated, that of drawing on the resources of business and industry, along with other interest groups in the community, to initiate massive reform in the ways in which American schools do business.

This movement toward a collaboration of effort for the improvement of the nation's educational system was led by the Governors' Summit Conference of 1989 and later, the Governors'

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[1]Corrigan 1990.

Commission of the States,[2] whose reported findings formed the basis of the national thrust which culminated in the America 2000 Program with its six national education goals which state in effect that, by the year 2000,

1. All children will start school ready to learn;
2. The dropout rate will decrease so that at least 9 out of 10 students will graduate;
3. American students will show competency in challenging subjects;
4. American students will be first in the world in math and science;
5. Every American adult will be literate and be able to perform skillfully in the workplace; and
6. Schools will be free from drugs and violence.[3]

By 1990 a national outline was formulated for redesigning American education toward the achievement of these goals through the utilization of a National Report Card of Progress with periodic progress reports by a National Education Goals Panel, as well as the use of a corollary in the form of the National Assessment of Educational Progress whose underlying premise would be a state-by-state testing program.[4] All these procedures, and more, were part of a sweeping effort to reform existing schools, launch massive

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[2]Cross 1990.

[3]*America 2000, An Education Strategy* 1991.

[4]Haertel 1991.

research and development collaboratives with business and industry, encourage life-long learning, and provide parental choice in designating the school which one's children would attend. The key to the success of the America 2000 Program was viewed as lying within the hands of the local community and its ability to initiate meaningful collaboration for the improvement of each individual school within its jurisdiction.

In keeping with the earlier work of the Governors' Summit, the chief executive officers of many states formulated plans for launching such local initiatives in the communities of their own state. The governor of New Mexico held a state-wide Summit on Educational Initiatives in October 1991, to which he invited approximately 100 citizens representing public schools, higher education, business, industry, the arts, health and human services, politics, and other constituencies concerned with the level of productivity of New Mexico's educational system. After spending the day in dialogue about the needs of students around the state and obstacles which might prevent the achievement of the National Education Goals in the state, participants were organized into nine strategic planning committees by geographic area and were charged with the mission of returning to their home region to initiate similar dialogues among key stakeholders in localities in that area. Each committee was to develop and carry out a regional summit during the spring semester, 1992. Those committees could call upon the governor's special assistant for education for aid in seeking

resources, including speakers, and for guidance in planning the content of their chosen program of activities.[5]

In April, 1992 the Southwestern New Mexico Regional Conference on America 2000 National Educational Goals (SWNMRC) was held on the campus of New Mexico State University. Seventy-five participants representing 14 school districts located in the southwestern region of the state attended the day-long conference. Among them were public school teachers and administrators, students, community and business leaders, representatives of health and human services agencies, parents, and elected officials. Included on the agenda was a speaker from the U.S. Secretary of Labor's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS), a program whose primary goal is to promote citizens' awareness of the need for educational reform in order to provide the nation with a skilled labor force, as well as a progress report from the local America 2000 Committee Chair on current activities in his district for the implementation of the national goals.[6]

Throughout the day, participants discussed the six national education goals in randomly assigned groups, after which they met in groups by district to formulate a plan of action for goal attainment in their own communities. Concerns and questions about

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[5]Chuck Spath, *the Governor's Advisor on Education*.

[6] (Speakers and other resources were acquired with the help of Chuck Spath).

the validity and reality of implementing the six education goals which came from the various discussions were exchanged and later shared with the governor's office. A summary compilation of similar reports from all nine regional summits were published by that office in July 1992 in a document entitled Working Together: Strategies to Renew Education in New Mexico which has since been distributed to educators and policy makers throughout the state.[7] All the conference activities were designed with one tenet of the America 2000 in mind: that sustained public interest would eventually lead to educational improvement.

A month after the conference, a follow-up questionnaire (Exhibit 2) seeking perceptions about the National Education Goals was mailed to all participants who, for the sake of this survey, had been categorized as either educators (including teachers, administrators, and school board members) or supporters of education (including parents and community members). A total of 30 completed questionnaires were returned and analyzed.

FINDINGS AND COMPARISONS

The Kropp-Verner attitude scale (Exhibit 1) was administered to those individuals who attended the SWNMRC in order to determine how participants valued the conference. Forty-three evaluation surveys were completed and returned. Since it was first published in 1956, the Kropp-Verner has been utilized frequently for the

[7](personal communication with Chuck Spath).

purpose of providing immediate feedback to meeting planners. The MSERA annual conference used it several times in the early years.

The instrument allows respondents to choose as many -- or as few of the scale items as they decide, in order to express their perceptions and reactions to the conference. It is necessary to recognize several caveats when utilizing this attitude scale, however --i.e., (a) each respondent will usually mark more than one response and as many as nine; (b) multiple responses by each person polled tends to reduce the impact of the respondent because the mean or median of his/her rejoinders will be farther from the top than would a single "good" response. In this administration of the instrument, two persons chose to use only one response each. One of those was near the bottom of the scale; the other was nearer the middle.

Respondents were self-identified as belonging to one of seven groups. Because the number of responses received was somewhat small, categories of respondents were collapsed into two mutually exclusive groups: (1) educators, and (2) non-educators. Tables A and B display the responses for each group. Following are some interpretations derived from those instruments.

The Non-educators were significantly more positive about the conference than were the Educators, although both groups were positive. Non-educators scored a group mean of 5.59 on the Kropp-

Verner scale and an even more positive mean of means at 5.02, while the Educators had a group mean of 6.61 and even less positive mean of means at 7.18. (See Table A for analysis of the responses to the Kropp-Verner Assessment Scale). One could reason that this difference is attributable to the educators' familiarity with the conference subject, a familiarity which caused them not to feel as attracted to "one more conference" about the ills of education and how to correct them.

Summarily, it may be that the best results from the conference on America 2000 are the involvements and emerging understandings and partnerships from and with persons representing the broader community -- i.e., business, parents, human services, students, others. The attitudes of non-educators about this conference, as shown by Kropp-Verner scores, seem to indicate a desire to relate to and work with educators to address the efforts of the America 2000 movement.

Results of the follow-up questionnaire were also quite similar regardless of the category of respondent. This instrument asked conference participants their perceptions of the impact of the America 2000 Program on meaningful change in public education (Table 1), as well as requesting that they rank the order of importance of each of the six national education goals (Table 2).

Means were tested for a significant difference between the two population groups; responses of educators were not significantly different from those of supporters of education on any of the seven questions concerning the impact of America 2000. Neither was there a significant difference between means of the two groups in prioritizing the six goals.

Overwhelmingly, both educators and supporters of education displayed strong feelings that there would be little chance of meaningful educational change without significantly more monies' being spent on public school reform (Figure I). Item number six on the questionnaire received a mean of 2.52 (Table 1). This concern for lack of funding is a direct parallel to the results of the most recent Gallup/Phi Delta Kappa national poll of the public's attitudes toward the public schools in which 22 percent of those polled rated concern for a lack of funding the major problem facing public education today (Elam, et al., 1992).

Secondly, the two groups of conference participants doubted that America 2000 would have much long range effect on the nation's educational system. A mean of 3.07 on item number one (Table 1) reflects this perception. Again, New Mexicans' perceptions mirrored those of the Gallup/$\phi\Delta$K respondents who voiced little confidence that any of the six national goals would be achieved by the year 2000.

Educators, as well as supporters of education, indicated a belief that collaborative partnerships between schools and community organizations would increase as an effect of America 2000 (Frequency = Figure III; Mean = 3.47, Table 1), which may be reflective of the strong willingness of the public polled nationally to volunteer without pay in the schools. Elam, et al. (1992) suggest that there is an untapped resource among the citizenry from which educators can draw in difficult economic times (p. 51).

It is interesting to note that, while size was perceived by conference participants to be relatively unimportant in a school district's being able to implement the national education goals (Mean = 3.66, Table 1), respondents did indicate a somewhat stronger belief that larger districts would have greater opportunity to benefit from America 2000 (Mean = 3.47, Table 1). At the same time, they ranked as least probable the extent to which urban school districts would have a greater opportunity to implement the six national goals (Frequency = Figure I; Mean = 3.70, Table 1). These responses tend to reflect the perception that urban districts are less likely to be rejuvenated through reform, regardless of their size, while there is hope for change in larger districts as long as they are not in the inner city. It might be appropriate to remind the reader that New Mexico is a sparcely populated state which has only one public school district larger than 23,000 pupils. The conference participants

represented districts the majority of which have fewer than 10,000 students.

With respect to the ranking of importance of the six national education goals, both educators and non-educators strongly championed the need to prepare young children to enter school ready to learn. This was deemed the most important national goal with a mean of 2.56 (Table 2). Once more, New Mexicans and those polled nationally espoused similar priorities; 49 percent of the Gallup/ΦΔK respondents were willing to pay more taxes to provide preschool programs for low income and poverty level children. There is an awareness, both regionally and nationwide, of the need to invest early in our children.

Ranked as a second priority were the goals of increased high school graduation and the demonstration of competence by American students, each of which had a mean of 3.26 (Table 2). Conference participants want New Mexico's young people to show tangible academic achievement.

Placing drug and violence free schools as fourth in importance among the ranking of the six national goals, with a mean of 3.48, might indicate that respondents to the follow-up questionnaire believe that the school environment in their districts is reasonably safe, or that at least, substantial progress has been made in this area. This may be a reflection of the fact that there

have been active programs addressing drug and gang prevention in communities throughout New Mexico for several years and the publicity for those programs has been wide-spread.

The necessity for dealing with adult literacy and for making American students first in the world in math and science were seen as the least important of the six national education goals by SWNMRC participants. Coincidentally, those goals were rated by respondents to the Gallup/ΦΔK poll as the two about which there was the least awareness on the part of the general public (Elam, et al., 1992). Perhaps the question of publicity is also relative to the perceptions of both the regional and the national respondents about these goals. It can be argued that much has been forthcoming in the media in recent years which focuses on the urgency to expand and improve early childhood health and education, as well as family circumstances. There appears to be a sense of shared value of children and their need for physiological, psychological, and material nourishment on the part of those polled both regionally and nationally.

In conclusion, it should be noted that schools are a microcosm of society. The ills found throughout our society exist to some degree in the public schools. Educators alone cannot fix all the problems of the nation's educational systems. The South West New Mexico Regional Conference brought together numerous stakeholders who were interested in the educational processes of their

districts, as well as those of the state as a whole. Conference participants demonstrated a desire for collaboration among various groups for the good of New Mexico's young people.

It is likely that any long range benefits coming from the America 2000 Program will stem from this collaboration. Utilizing the insights, expertise, and creativity of many groups within a given community is the challenge which faces today's educators. In order to fulfill the potential for meaningful educational reform, all stakeholders will need to establish regular, continuous dialogue with one another and to learn to understand the perceptions held by each group. If regional conferences such as the one described in this study can aid in initiating such dialogue, they will have been well worth the time and dollars expended to conduct them.

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8. **Table 2** -- SWNMR Conference: Mean Ranking of the Six National Goals for America 2000

EXHIBIT 1

KROPP - VERNER ASSESSMENT

an attitude scale

the scale

1. It was one of the most rewarding experiences I have ever had. _____
2. Exactly what I wanted. _____
3. I hope we can have another one in the near future. _____
4. It provided the kind of experience that I can apply to my own situation. _____
5. It helped me personally. _____
6. It solved some problems for me. _____
7. I think it served its purpose. _____
8. It had some merits. _____
9. It was fair. _____
10. It was neither very good nor very poor. _____
11. I was mildly disappointed. _____
12. It was not exactly what I needed. _____
13. It was too general. _____
14. I am not taking any new ideas away. _____
15. It didn't hold my interest. _____
16. It was much too superficial. _____
17. I leave dissatisfied. _____
18. It was very poorly planned. _____
19. I didn't learn a thing. _____
20. It was a complete waste of time. _____

This response form is designed to permit you to share your perception about the session in which you have participated. You should mark by a check or x, any item(s) which you feel appropriate to express your reactions. **DO NOT SIGN** - but please identify the responder category in which you best fit:

CATEGORY OF RESPONDENT: Administrator____ Teacher_____ Parent_____
Student_____ School Board_____ Business Community_____ Human Services_____
Legislator_____ Other_____

TABLE A

Summaries of Kropp-Verner Data of Attendees at SWNMR Conference

	Parents	Business	Human Services	Students	Others*	Totals
N	3	5	2	2	10	22
Scores	19.03	27.13	11.00	15.40	51.66	124.28
Mean	6.36	5,43	5.5	7.70	5.17	5.65

	Administrators	Teachers	Sch. Bd. Members	Totals
N	12	7	2	21
Scores	80.29	59.53	11.00	150.82
Mean	6.69	8.50	5.50	7.18

	Non-Educators*	Educators
N	22	21
Scores	509	529
Mean	5.59	6.61
Mean of Means	5.02	7.18

* Includes all forms where catagory of respondent was not marked.

† Score data is the total sum for the group designated.

EXHIBIT 2

America 2000 Questionnaire S.W.N.M. Regional Conference Follow-up

Likert Scale response - Answer by circling the letter representing your perception of the extent to which the item applies, 1 being low and 5 being high.

1. How much long range difference do you expect America 2000 will make in public education, nationally?
   1 2 3 4 5
   low high

2. To what extent will collaborative partnerships between schools and community organizations increase (as an effect of America 2000)?
   1 2 3 4 5
   low high

3. How relevant is size of school/district to potential benefits from American 2000?
   1 2 3 4 5

4. To what extent do larger school districts have greater opportunity to implement America 2000 goals than smaller ones?
   1 2 3 4 5

5. To what extent do Urban school districts have greater opportunity to implement America 2000 goals than rural ones?
   1 2 3 4 5

6. To what extent can change be made toward America 2000 goals without requiring significantly more funds?
   1 2 3 4 5

7. How effective are the working committees as a means of developing strategies/plans for implementing America 2000 at the local level?
   1 2 3 4 5

8. Which is the most important goal of the six goals stated in America 2000?

9. Rank order the goals in order of priority/importance. (Write in rank order)

   a. All children start school ready to learn
   b. High School graduation increase to at least 90 per cent
   c. American students will demonstrate competency in challenging subjects
   d. U.S. students will be first in the world in math & science
   e. Every adult will be literate
   f. Every school will be free of drugs and violence

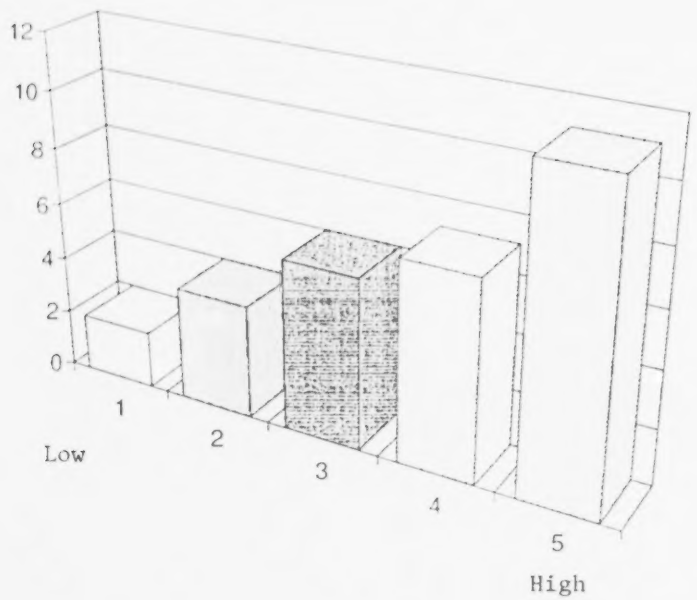
10. What <u>one</u> strategy would you employ, given the opportunity, to implement one or more of the America 2000 goals?

SWNMR CONFERENCE

AMERICA 2000 QUESTIONNAIRE

Frequency of Participants' Responses
to

Question #5



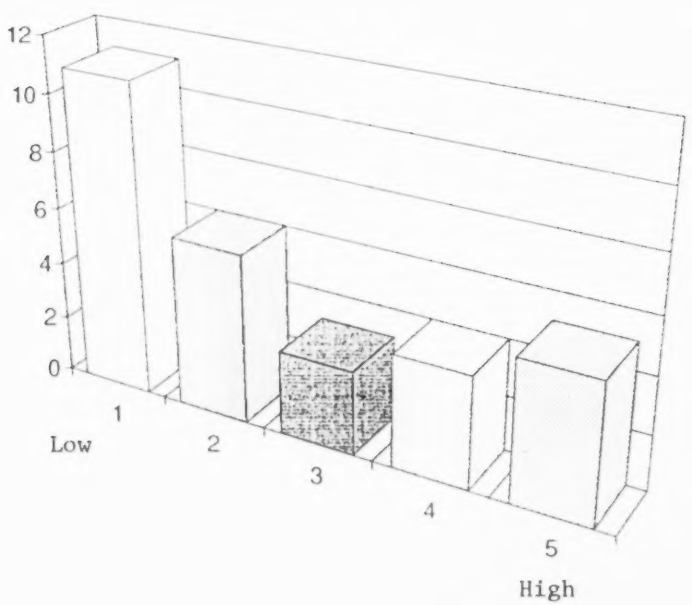
To what extent do Urban school districts have greater opportunity to implement America 2000 goals than rural ones?

SWNMR CONFERENCE

AMERICA 2000 QUESTIONNAIRE

Frequency of Participants' Responses
to

Question #6



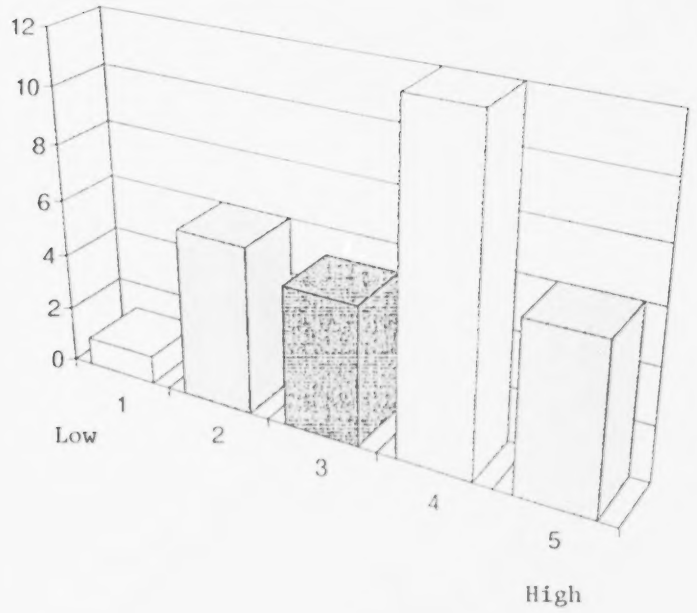
To what extent can change be made toward America 2000 goals without requiring significantly more funds?

SWNMR CONFERENCE

AMERICA 2000 QUESTIONNAIRE

Frequency of Participants' Responses
to

Question #7



How effective are the working committees as a means of developing strategies/plans for implementing America 2000 at the local level?

SWNMR CONFERENCE

Table 1 - Means on the Seven Questions on the America 2000 Survey

TOTAL GROUP MEAN (N=30)	RANK ORDER	ITEM DESCRIPTION
3.70	1	Extent to which Urban school districts have greater opportunity to implement America 2000 goals.
3.66	2	Relevance of size of school district to benefits of America 2000.
3.53	3	Effectiveness of committees in developing strategies for implementing America 2000.
3.47	4.5	Extent to which larger school districts have opportunity to benefit from America 2000.
3.47	4.5	Collaborative Partnerships will increase.
3.07	6	Long range difference America 2000 will make.
2.52	7	Extent to which change can be made without significantly more funding.

*Note: Means were tested for significant differences; educators and supporters of education were not significantly different on the ranking of the six national goals.

**Scale: 1 2 3 4 5
Low High

SWNMR CONFERENCE

Table 2 - Mean Ranking of the Six National Goals for America 2000

TOTAL GROUP MEAN (N=30)	RANK ORDER	GOAL	
2.56	1	9a.	All children will go to school ready to learn.
3.26	2.5	9b.	High school graduation will increase to at least 90 percent.
3.26	2.5	9c.	American students will demonstrate competency in challenging subjects.
3.48	4	9f.	Schools will be free of drugs and violence.
3.89	5	9e.	Every adult will be literate.
4.56	6	9d.	U.S. students will be first in math and science.

*Note: Respondents ranked goals in order of importance with "1" as <u>most</u> important and "6" <u>least</u> important.

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